How to Choose the Right GCC Setup Model in India: Captive, BOT, BOA, Assisted Build, or Hybrid?

Setting up a Global Capability Centre (GCC) in India is one of the most consequential strategic decisions a global enterprise can make. Yet one question consistently surfaces before any lease is signed or talent pipeline built: Which GCC setup model is right for us?

The answer is rarely obvious. Different operating models carry different cost structures, risk profiles, speed-to-value timelines, and long-term implications for control and governance. Choosing the wrong model, or defaulting to the most popular one, can mean years of course correction.

This blog breaks down five primary GCC setup models in India: Captive, Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT), Build-Operate-Assist (BOA), Assisted Build, and Hybrid. Explore a framework to evaluate which fits your enterprise's strategy, maturity, and risk appetite.

Why Your GCC Operating Model Is a Strategic Decision, Not a Procurement Choice

The GCC setup model you choose determines far more than vendor relationships. It shapes:

• How quickly you can scale talent and operations

• How much operational risk you absorb vs. transfer

• Your ability to build proprietary IP, culture, and institutional knowledge

• Long-term cost optimisation and governance control

• Your enterprise's internal capability maturity over time

Several enterprises treat model selection as a sourcing exercise. The most successful GCC builders treat it as an architectural decision – one that needs to align with their global operating model, leadership bandwidth, and five-year strategic roadmap.

Understanding the Five Most Common GCC Setup Models in India

Model 1: Captive GCC – Full Ownership, Full Control

What Is a Captive GCC?

A Captive GCC is wholly owned and operated by the parent enterprise. The company sets up its own legal entity in India, handles all hiring, infrastructure, compliance, and operations directly, or through a service provider for specific HR or payroll functions.

How It Works:

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- Enterprise establishes its own India entity
- Talent is hired directly under the company's employment structure
- Processes, governance, and operations are managed internally
- Full ownership of costs, risks, and outcomes

Ideal For:

- Enterprises with a long-term India strategy
- Organisations prioritising IP protection, security, and cultural alignment
- Companies with the leadership capacity to manage setup complexity

Advantages:

- Maximum control over talent, governance, and culture
- Strong IP and data protection
- Better cost efficiency at scale
- Direct alignment with business objectives

Challenges

- High upfront investment
- Longer setup and ramp-up timelines
- Significant management involvement required
- Greater exposure to execution risks

When It Works Best

A Captive GCC is best suited for enterprises committed to building a strategic, long-term operation in India and willing to invest in ownership, governance, and capability development from day one.

Model 2: Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) — Managed Launch, Owned Outcome

What Is a BOT GCC?

In the Build-Operate-Transfer model, a specialised GCC advisory and enablement partner builds and operates the India centre on your behalf for a defined period, typically two to four years, before transferring full ownership and operations to the parent company.

How It Works:

- Partner establishes the GCC, hires talent, and manages initial operations
- Enterprise retains strategic oversight and direction
- Operations run under the partner's framework during the build phase
- Ownership of people, processes, and governance transfers to the enterprise at a defined stage

Ideal For:

- First-time GCC builders
- Enterprises seeking to reduce setup risk
- Organisations planning long-term ownership but lacking local expertise or bandwidth

Advantages:

- Faster market entry
- Lower setup risk and complexity
- Reduced upfront investment
- Clear pathway to full ownership

Challenges:

- Success depends heavily on partner selection
- Transition requires careful planning and governance
- Potential cultural and knowledge transfer risks
- Additional costs during the operate phase

When It Works Best:

When enterprises need accelerated setup while embedding leadership, culture, and governance from day one to ensure a seamless transition to full ownership.

Model 3: Build-Operate-Assist (BOA) — Ownership with Ongoing Advisory

What Is a BOA GCC?

The Build-Operate-Assist model is a variant that prioritises the parent enterprise's direct ownership and control from the outset; but retains an advisory and operational support partner on an ongoing basis. Rather than a time-bound transfer, the relationship is designed for sustained strategic partnership.

How It Works:

- Enterprise owns and operates the GCC from day one
- Specialist partner provides ongoing support across talent, governance, operations, and scaling
- Partner functions as an embedded extension of the GCC leadership team

Ideal For:

- Enterprises seeking ownership with continuous expert guidance

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- Organisations navigating complex or rapidly evolving GCC strategies
- Leaders looking for a long-term strategic partner rather than setup support alone

Advantages:

- Combines enterprise control with specialist expertise
- Accelerates decision-making and execution
- Enables continuous optimisation of talent, governance, and operations
- Well suited for multi-function and growth-focused GCCs

Challenges

- Requires strong partner alignment and trust
- Involves ongoing advisory investment
- Outcomes depend on the quality of the partnership

When It Works Best

When enterprises want full ownership from day one while leveraging ongoing expertise to accelerate growth, reduce risk, and continuously strengthen GCC performance.

Model 4: Assisted Build — Accelerated Captive with Embedded Expertise

What Is the Assisted Build Model?

The Assisted Build model sits closest to Captive but replaces the learning curve with embedded specialist expertise. The parent company owns and operates the GCC from day one, but a GCC advisory firm is embedded within their team to accelerate setup, de-risk early decisions, and transfer institutional knowledge rapidly.

How It Works:

- Enterprise retains full ownership of the GCC from day one
- Embedded advisors support setup, talent, compliance, governance, and leadership hiring
- Focus is on capability building and knowledge transfer, not long-term dependency

Ideal For:

- Enterprises with a clear GCC vision but limited India experience
- Organisations seeking faster execution with reduced setup risk
- Businesses operating under aggressive growth or board-driven timelines

Advantages:

- Full ownership without transfer complexity
- Faster ramp-up than a standalone Captive model
- Access to specialist expertise and local market knowledge
- Knowledge and capabilities remain with the enterprise

Challenges:

- Requires active leadership involvement
- Advisory costs sit alongside setup investment
- Success depends on effective knowledge transfer

When It Works Best

When enterprises want to build and own their GCC from day one while leveraging embedded expertise to accelerate execution, reduce risk, and strengthen internal capability.

Model 5: Hybrid GCC — Configurable for Complex Mandates

What Is a Hybrid GCC Model?

The Hybrid model is exactly what it sounds like: a bespoke combination of the above structures, tailored to the specific complexity, risk appetite, and timeline of the enterprise. In practice, large global enterprises setting up multi-country or multi-function GCCs often find that no single model fits every workstream.

How It Works:

- Combines elements of Captive, BOT, Assisted Build, and BOA models
- Different functions operate under different structures based on business needs
- Governance and advisory support help coordinate the overall GCC strategy
- Model evolves as the GCC scales and matures

Ideal For:

- Large enterprises with multi-function GCCs
- Organisations pursuing phased expansion strategies
- Businesses balancing speed, control, and investment efficiency

Advantages:

- Highly flexible and scalable
- Enables tailored risk and investment allocation
- Supports phased growth without major restructuring

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- Aligns well with complex GCC mandates

Challenges:

- More complex to design and govern
- Requires clear accountability and operating frameworks
- Success depends on strong partner and governance alignment

When It Works Best

When enterprises have diverse capability requirements and the governance maturity to manage multiple operating models within a unified GCC strategy.

1
What is the GCC's business mandate?
Cost centre, capability hub, or innovation engine
2
How fast do you need to launch?
Timeline pressure shapes your model choice from day one
3
Do you have prior GCC experience?
In-house maturity determines how much advisory support you need
4
How much control is required?
Ownership vs. flexibility – a spectrum, not a binary
5
What is your long-term growth vision?
Scale ambition should anchor every structural decision

How to Choose the Right GCC Setup Model

The decision should start with the business mandate, not the model itself. Enterprise leaders should evaluate five key factors:

- **Business Objective:** Is the GCC focused on cost optimisation, capability creation, innovation, transformation, or growth?
- **Speed to Launch:** How quickly does the operation need to become productive?
- **Internal Expertise:** Does the organisation have prior GCC experience or require specialist support?
- **Control Requirements:** How important are governance, compliance, and direct ownership?
- **Long-Term Vision:** Will the chosen model support the GCC's future scale and strategic role?

The right model aligns with both immediate objectives and long-term ambitions.

Focus on the Operating Model, Not Just the Setup

Successful GCCs are not measured by how quickly they launch but by how effectively they scale. The strongest enterprises design operating models that support governance, talent development, accountability, and business outcomes from day one. While setup is temporary, the operating model shapes performance for years to come.

The IMS OneWorld Perspective

There is no universally correct GCC setup model in India.

Captive, BOT, BOA, Assisted Build, and Hybrid approaches each have valid applications depending on business objectives, organizational maturity, and growth strategy.

The critical question is not which model is most popular. It is which model best enables your enterprise to build scalable global capability while maintaining the right balance of control, speed, flexibility, and long-term value creation.

At IMS OneWorld, we enable enterprises evaluate, establish, and scale GCCs through operating model design, setup enablement, governance frameworks, talent strategy, and execution support. Whether you are launching your first GCC or expanding an existing global operation, the objective remains the same: build a structure designed for sustainable business outcomes, not simply operational capacity.

Choosing the right GCC setup model can determine how quickly your operation scales, how effectively it performs, and how much long-term value it delivers.

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